

Work begins on 8-bed Morrisville facility

[Times Argus](#)

September 21, 2012

By David Taube VERMONT PRESS BUREAU

MORRISVILLE — Some 35 construction workers busily took up projects Thursday along two long hallways lacking walls in what will be an eight-bed psychiatric facility. The workers were busy in order to make up for a six-week delay due to asbestos remediation.

As a result, the nearly \$1.68 million renovation project has bumped up in price to \$1.89 million for the state. And the delay has only further re-emphasized the need for such a facility after strains were put on the state mental health system when Tropical Storm Irene heavily damaged the Vermont State Hospital in Waterbury last year.

“We’re waiting anxiously for the Morrisville facility to open because eight beds sounds like nothing, but it’s a 25 percent or more increase in beds that are actually available to this population,” said Mental Health Department Commissioner Patrick Flood on Wednesday during a Joint Fiscal Committee meeting at the Statehouse.

Last year, the storm flooded the 54-bed Vermont State Hospital, requiring patients and hundreds of state workers in the surrounding complex to be temporarily displaced to facilities around the state.

The Shumlin administration has announced plans to bring back some 950 state workers to the Waterbury site through a new complex, and the state plans to start construction before winter in Berlin on a 25-bed state hospital for psychiatric patients.

But the need is acute, many state officials in the administration, as well as mental health advocates, have cautioned.

In some cases, the state has had to rely on keeping patients in emergency rooms until beds became available; correctional facilities also have been used.

The state recently moved three patients out of Southern State Correctional Facility in Springfield in an effort to close the unit, but one patient remains there.

Other additions include six beds at Rutland Regional Medical Center and 14 beds at the Brattleboro Retreat — both permanent changes. Rutland’s upgrades should be completed around March 1; the retreat expects to finish construction in February, Flood said.

The Morrisville facility, called the Green Mountain Psychiatric Care Center, is under a two-year lease with the state that began earlier this summer. The building once served as a nursing home before Lamoille Community Connections, a nonprofit that serves developmental and mental health needs in the Lamoille Valley, acquired the facility in 2004.

The head of the nonprofit, Savi Van Sluytman, said the state could continue its lease for an additional year, if needed.

The psychiatric facility includes two one-story wings of the building. There are five wings total coming off a central hub.

The state expects to transition away from the Morrisville facility when a new state hospital is opened in the future, said Frank Reed, the state's director of mental health operations.

"The state's commitment is it's only temporary," he said of the Morrisville facility.

Renovations will create a nurse's station and administrative offices among other features for the roughly 3,000-square-foot facility. The center will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A typical day staff will include three nurses and eight psychiatric technicians, such as social workers and other support staff.

Construction began in mid-August.